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Technology Lecture Series

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Charles Lutz Visits Dordt

On campus March 9, 1982, was Charles Lutz, author of *Farming The Lord's Land*. Lutz, Director of the Office of Church and Society of the American Lutheran Church lectured in Dr. Allan Kramer's Land Use Economics Course and was the keynote speaker at the Christian Farmers of America dinner meeting held in the West Commons.

Lutz's Iowa connection includes having spent his high school years in Renwick (Humboldt County) and his collegiate days at Wartburg in Waverly. Lutz, who attended seminary but is not a minister, challenged farmers, students, and other interested Christians to develop a "theology of the land." He urged listeners to regard the land as a gift from God, a gift that is more a trust than an absolute gift. God, he asserted, always retains title to the land. Human beings, whether farmers or others, are merely tenants. Thus they must recognize limits to property rights. Decisions concerning land use must be made with the good of the community in mind. Land is to be held tenderly and tentatively; these are biblical notions (cf. the Sabbatical and Jubilee regulations of the Old Testament).

All land practices must be such that the

land is left in a better condition for the next generation, for it is from the land, "the placenta for life," that we are sustained, said Lutz.

Prime agricultural land must be kept for producing food and fibre and for providing a habitat for wild life. When speculators hold land for "development," that land will likely produce "asphalt (i.e., a paved parking area) as its last crop," said Lutz. Conservation of land includes more than keeping topsoil from blowing, or washing away. One million acres of prime agricultural land is lost in the United States each year. Cities and suburbs carve out "subdivisions" from farm land; interstate highways cut wide swaths for roadbed median and right of way. At 2,000 calories per day, 16 million people could have been fed, from United States farm land lost this way each year.

Lutz stated that a "theology of the land" is the basis for Christian action. Our life-style must reflect a caring attitude; we must seek public policies which will keep farm land from being destroyed, misused, or acquired by greedy entrepreneurs.

John M. Zinkand

Technology Lecture Series

The meaning and the goals of technology were subjects of a February lecture series held in conjunction with the recent introduction of a four-year engineering program at Dordt. The lecturers were Robert Hudspith, of the engineering faculty of McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, and Michael Van Wijk, manager of industrial studies of Alcan International of Pierrefonds, Quebec.

Hudspith answered "What is Technology?" in his first lecture by pointing out that technology possesses certain characteristics. Each characteristic illustrates that technology is non-neutral. Thus, in technology there is a tendency to build larger

and more complex machines and other structures (for example, modern day 747s have replaced small commercial passenger planes), and consequently we need large scale management. Some persons say that technology is acceptable only when it is used properly. But, says Hudspith, in the nature of the case, management must be large scale if there is to be large scale building. If such management has undesirable results, then technology—at least as we now conceive it—of necessity must involve those results. It is not a simple matter of proper and improper use of technology.

So it is with other characteristics.

Technology has become very specialized, and therefore the expert has become alienated from others in his discipline. Similarly, the increasing mechanization of technology (for example, sometimes robots are used on assembly lines) is responsible for technology becoming more capital intensive, with all that such a development implies. In this way the characteristics of technology can be analyzed to show that technology is not neutral. Hudspith showed that developments in ancient technology and during the Industrial Revolution also reflected the attitude of society toward organization and the importance—or the insignificance—of the individual.

In the second lecture, "Norms for Technology," Van Wijk discussed norms the technician uses, such as standards for production or for explaining to the consumer the nature of the product. For example, ASA (American Standards Association) numbers describe film speeds. Van Wijk went on to discuss the relation of technical norms to various aspects of creation, such as the economic, aesthetic, ethical, and legal aspects. These technical norms fit into the created law structure. In this context he concluded his talk by defining *engineering*. Engineering, he said, is an organized activity, a developmental activity, a development of technical norms, an activity which focuses on practical problems, and an activity which includes an implementation of that which has been developed.

In the "Technology and Society" session, Hudspith described several determinist models of the relationship between technology and society. He then discussed in detail our "technological fix." We believe we can solve problems. But there are two kinds of problems: *tame* and *wicked*. Tame problems may at first seem difficult. But they can—assuming science and technology have been developed sufficiently—be solved. Thus, it was possible to put man on the moon. But some social problems, such as the problems of the ghettos, are wicked. Such problems are tough and difficult to

describe accurately. With wicked problems, we do not know when a solution has been obtained. For such problems there is no simple solution. Wicked problems cannot be solved by experimenting, for usually only one attempted solution can be carried out. Wicked problems are usually symptoms of other problems. Finally, quite unlike the solution to a tame problem, the solution to a wicked problem depends upon the one who "solves" it.

Hudspith described proposed alternatives to the technological fix. These alternative approaches have several elements in common: they minimize use of non-renewable resources, and they emphasize local and regional self-sufficiency, the importance of the individual, and the need for certain social and political changes.

During the same session Van Wijk discussed technology in the societies of developing countries. Technology is not easily transferred from more developed countries. One problem is that the developing countries do not want what they call "second class technology." Many spokesmen of the less developed countries are simplistic and too optimistic. An unfortunate aspect of the whole question is that much of technology which is transferred to these countries is military technology.

One session was devoted to a discussion by a panel consisting of Hudspith, Van Wijk, and three Dordt faculty members. The production of public power—whether by nuclear reactors, coal-fired generators, or other means—dominated the first part of the meeting. Other subjects related to technology surfaced in the part of the meeting participated in by the audience. Of particular interest were questions concerning the just treatment of animals, the just treatment of institutions and "things" such as rivers, and the particular challenges facing the graduate of a Christian engineering program.

Hudspith and Van Wijk both lectured in the final session, "Evaluation and Control of Technology." Hudspith reviewed various

ideas and theories on who or what is in control of technology. He maintained that the Christian idea of who should be in control should include participation of the common man. For example, professional city planners can make poor decisions concerning where a rapid transit system is to be built, how it should operate, and so forth. He gave an example of a city which profited from consumer input when a rapid transit system was built. For Hudspeth, one of the great questions of technological development is, "How can we bring the user back into the process?"

Van Wijk's lecture on evaluation and control was the last of the series. He claimed that modern day futurists have presented us with a secularized version of the Biblical promise of a new heaven and a new earth. In reality they bring bad news, not good news. In this context we are to bring the good news of Christ. Van Wijk interpreted some "coming of the Kingdom" Biblical passages in terms

of what Christians must do now.

Finally, Van Wijk presented "a modest proposal." He said that discussion should now lead to action. He suggested that Dordt College form an interdisciplinary studies center which would be devoted to the solving of problems, especially the problems of the third world. The third world needs clean drinking water; means of cultivating, raising, and storing food; human shelter appropriate to the climate; locally produced energy; and much else. Such a studies center could focus on one country. Some Dordt graduates could serve in that country. Although Van Wijk gave only the broad outline of his plan, it obviously intrigued many of his hearers.

The three-day lecture series was well attended and the source of many fruitful campus discussions. There is no doubt about it, the faithful Christian college must make Christ's claims in the area of technology.

Russel Maatman

Poland and the Free World

It was an unusual and pleasant experience for a Dordt audience to be faced by a guest speaker who was charming and graceful as well as learned. The occasion was a January lecture by Dr. Alice-Catherine Carls, adjunct professor of humanities at Sterling College, Kansas, on "Poland's Meaning for the Free World." Speaking with a delightful French accent (Carls is a native Frenchwoman, Ph.D. Paris-Sorbonne), she brought both the benefit of expertise in her major area of study and interest and a passionate concern which at times lifted her voice above the usual academic presentation.

Carls chose to avoid details about the current events in Poland, since these have been so much in the news that another recitation would be superfluous. Instead, she focused on the relevance of Poland and its woes for us, asking how they should concern us and what our response should be.

Two temptations are especially present,

said the speaker, both of which would be not only improper from a Christian viewpoint, but also historically unproductive of genuine solutions to the problems of Eastern Europe.

The first temptation is to answer violence with violence. Though this has to be a sore temptation to the frustrated Poles themselves, Carls praised the Solidarity union for resisting the urge to respond to the regime and its Soviet sponsors in kind. Solidarity's struggle for freedom has always been marked by non-violent actions, she pointed out. Roman Catholic leaders have also encouraged conscientious non-violent response to government pressures. Christians in the United States must follow the same path, urged Carls, in calling for support of the Poles. Keep talking about Poland, inform others, keep the record straight in resisting false propaganda, and give whatever aid you can, she said, but eschew a response of violence, as being both morally reprehensible